

Offprint

Development in the Asia Pacific

A Public Policy Perspective

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7 Environmental Policy-making in New Zealand: Global Images and Local Realities

Ton Bührs

Introduction

As a sparsely populated, primarily agricultural nation, remote from the main industrial areas in the world, New Zealand enjoys a "clean and green" image. This image is further enhanced by the fact that New Zealand governments have played an active role in international and global environmental issues. However, domestic policy-making in New Zealand has been ambiguous with regard to taking on board environmental considerations, creating a discrepancy between New Zealand's global image and domestic reality. In this paper, some of the reasons for this discrepancy are analysed. The analysis is organised on the basis of a three stage model of the policy cycle: agenda-setting, decision-making, and implementation.¹ Within each of the stages, the main factors and changes affecting environmental policy development in New Zealand are discussed. A final section summarizes the argument, and concludes that the growing importance of international and global environmental issues is likely to put increasing pressure on governments to reduce the divergence between foreign policy pretensions and domestic environmental performance.

Agenda-Setting: The Recognition of Environmental Problems

Environmental problems compete with many other things in catching the attention of policy-makers. Given the sheer number of demands directed at governments, and the obvious limitations on the capacity of governments to address demands at any one time, some problems get inevitably more attention than others. To what extent a problem draws the attention of policy-makers depends not necessarily on its severity, but also on public recognition, "focusing events", the availability of practicable solutions, and on the political climate (Kingdon, 1984). Although agenda-setting is to a large degree unpredictable, it is not a process purely subject to ran-

dom. The chance of problems reaching the formal decision-making agenda is considerably affected by the efforts of policy entrepreneurs, as well as by the degree of access of interested parties to the decision-makers (Cobb et al., 1976). Also, the attention given to problems is very much affected by the framework within which decisions are made, with institutions acting as filters with an inherent bias towards the recognition of some problems and the neglect of others (Schattschneider, 1960; Bachrach and Baratz, 1963; Crenson, 1971; Healey, 1990).

Environmental issues, although subject to the general forces of the issue-attention cycle (Downs, 1972), have proven to be persistent and robust in their attention and support generating capacity (Dunlap, 1989). After the first wave of environmentalism around 1970, which led in many countries to institutional adjustments for dealing with environmental matters, environmental issues never completely vanished from the public agenda. By 1990, a second wave of environmentalism occurred. More than ever, policy-makers in many countries were confronted with the need to address environmental demands, generated by the perceived aggravation of global environmental pressures (the thinning of the ozone layer; greenhouse effect), as well as by a shift in Western societies towards "post-materialist" values (I. Inglehart, 1977; R. Inglehart, 1990; Milbrath, 1984).

To a large extent, the recognition of environmental problems in New Zealand has followed the more general pattern outlined above. The first wave of environmentalism in New Zealand came to a climax in 1972, and was accompanied by the establishment of the first green party (on a national level) in the world (Rainbow, 1987). The two main political parties, Labour and National, contended for the greenest image, which led to the appointment of a Minister for the Environment and, subsequently, to the establishment of a Commission for the Environment (Bührs, 1991a). Environmental issues continued to surface during the 1970s and 1980s, reaching new prominence towards the end of the 1980s. This led to further institutional changes in the environmental policy framework, which will be elaborated upon in a following section. The general pattern of evolution in environmental demands in New Zealand, then, seems to reflect the experience in other Western countries.

However, a closer look at the agenda-setting process in New Zealand reveals that the recognition of environmental problems has been characterised by a rather uneven pattern of attention given to issues. In general, nature conservation issues have tended to play a much greater role on the agenda than other kinds of environmental issues (Bührs, 1987), whereas more recently, global environmental problems have become more prominent. By contrast, pollution problems and urban quality of life issues have drawn much less attention.

The predominance of conservation issues amongst environmental problems in New Zealand has its roots in a history of development based on the exploitation of natural resources. Since the start of European settlement in the 1840s, the rate of forest clearance increased rapidly, and by the 1970s forest cover was reduced to 23 percent of the country, compared to 78 percent prior to human habitation.² Much of the clearance took place through burn-offs, as a rapid way of establishing pasture, with initially only a small proportion of timber utilized. The logging of indigenous forests became a major industry, however, and continues until the present day, although on a much smaller scale, and primarily on private land. Goldmining also contributed to forest clearance in certain areas. With the disappearance of forests, the habitat of many indigenous animals was also destroyed, leading to New Zealand's sad record with regard to the extinction or near-extinction of many native species, particularly birds (Nature Conservation Council, 1981). Whale and seal hunting took place to the point of becoming an uneconomic enterprise because of dwindling numbers.

Subsequent natural resource use practices further contributed to further environmental pressures. Grazing on cleared hill-slopes led to serious erosion problems, affecting about one-third of the total area of New Zealand (Department of Statistics, 1989), and to floods. Groundwater drinking supplies in some areas have come under threat by nitrate contamination from various sources related to agriculture (OECD, 1981). Urban expansion has occurred on scarce fertile land. Hydro-electricity development has also contributed to the flooding of some good agricultural land, and has destroyed the wild and scenic character of many rivers. Harbours and coastal areas have been polluted by inadequate sewage treatment, and other waste disposal practices.

Of these pressures and problems, those affecting indigenous forests and wildlife, as well as the scenic and wilderness qualities of remaining natural landscapes, have provoked most public reaction. Demands for setting aside relatively untouched areas led to the establishment of a network of national parks.³ From the 1960s onwards the conservation movement developed into a major political force, mobilising public opinion against development proposals which encroached upon remaining areas of indigenous forests and natural beauty. A catalyst in this respect was a hydro-development proposal for Lake Manapouri in 1960, triggering off a mass protest against the planned raising of the lake level (Wilson, 1982). Public arousal also occurred on the issue of the logging of indigenous forests, and led, in 1977, to the presentation to Parliament of one of the biggest petitions in the history of New Zealand. During the 1980s, support for nature conservation issues grew significantly, enabling conservation groups to appoint more full-time staff, and to develop into professional lobby organizations. This further enhanced the political effectiveness of the conservation

movement, which found reflection in, amongst other, the creation of an advocate for nature conservation within the administrative framework, and in the initiative by the government to nominate a part of the protected areas for World Heritage Status.

Apart from nature conservation issues, international environmental issues have also figured prominently on the political agenda in New Zealand. Particularly under Labour governments, whose foreign policies have tended to be inspired by normative stances and public feelings, international environmental issues, coupled with security issues, have been the subject of vigorous debate and action. In 1957, for instance, the New Zealand government initiated a proposal to give "World Park Status" to Antarctica, but found little support for the idea with other nations. Similarly, nuclear issues, interpreted as a mix of security and environmental problems, have figured prominently on the country's political agenda. French nuclear testing in the South Pacific has been responsible for provoking and intensifying much of the public concern on this matter, and led the New Zealand government to send, in 1972, a warship to the French nuclear testing zone to manifest that concern. Strong public anti-nuclear feelings culminated in the adoption of a ban on nuclear ship visits in 1984, and the introduction of non-nuclear legislation in 1987. New Zealand was also an active force in the formation of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone. The bombing of the "Rainbow Warrior" by French agents in Auckland's harbour in 1985 only served to fuel the anti-nuclear stance, swelling the support for "Greenpeace", making it the biggest environmental organization in the country.

More recently, some other international environmental issues also got into the limelight, such as the protection of the Antarctic against mining, driftnet-fishing, ozone depletion, and the greenhouse effect. Again, strong lobbying by environmental groups, supported by a general upsurge in public concern about the environment, have led the government to play an active role on the world stage, inspired by green views and demands. This has further enhanced New Zealand's international image of a "clean and green" country with a strong environmental commitment.

Support for this perception of New Zealand is also coming from some of the literature on the green movement in New Zealand, depicting it, parallel to the environmental movements in Australia and North America, as being of a "deeper green" nature than the environmental movement in European countries, where concerns are allegedly of a more anthropocentric character, more distanced from nature and wilderness experience (Hay and Haward, 1988). Implicitly, these observations provide a basis for the contention that New Zealand is a society where a shift of dominant values towards a post-materialist, new cultural paradigm (Inglehart, 1977)

may be more advanced, or at least finds more fertile ground, than in other countries.

However, there is little evidence available to back up these arguments. One study among leading environmentalists in New Zealand has found that their approach to environmental issues has been highly pragmatic, and more inspired by a rational, reductionist philosophy than by ideological motivations (Tester, 1987). The emphasis on nature in the environmental movement in New Zealand can also be seen as a weakness, a manifestation of a failure to connect the pressure on ecosystems with political, economic and social sources.

Some environmental problems in New Zealand, despite their actual or potential seriousness, have attracted relatively little public attention. In particular pollution problems have been long ignored, largely due to the view that New Zealand's demographic, geographical, and meteorological situation (low population density, concentration of population on the coast, not much heavy industry, land surrounded by ocean, plenty of wind) implied that pollution problems were insignificant compared to those in many other countries. This attitude has been bolstered by a popular "she'll be right" attitude, a pragmatic and "philosophical" approach to problems, which is only gradually weakening. Issues related to hazardous substances, land degradation, groundwater pollution, the effects of intensive use of pesticides and fertilizers, wasteful energy practices, sewage treatment, marine pollution, public transport, and urban development have all suffered relative neglect, and are only recently and slowly receiving more serious attention, both from within the environmental movement and the government.

Although New Zealand was one of the first countries in which a green political party (the "Values Party") did emerge, the development of a more comprehensive and ideological approach to the environment, integrating ecological, economic, and social needs in the search for a sustainable society, has so far hardly got off the ground. Only recently a new green party was established, but it may well suffer the same fate as its predecessor and other small parties in New Zealand, political marginality and eventual demise, if the existing political system remains in place. In order to assess some of the institutional impediments for a less fragmented and ad hoc approach to environmental issues in the agenda-setting stage, an analysis of the decision-making framework in New Zealand is necessary.

The Decision-making Framework: The Shifting Role of the State

The New Zealand electoral system is based on the "first-past-the-post" principle, implying that parliamentary representatives are chosen on the basis of a simple majority in 97 electorates. The system, based on the British model, makes it very hard for smaller parties to gain a presence in Parliament, where two main parties, National and Labour, usually share most of the seats amongst them. The system allows governments to enjoy a comfortable majority in Parliament, despite the fact that they often attract less than fifty percent of the votes. Government ministers, selected from the members of the majority party in Parliament ("Caucus"), keep their seats in Parliament, and are usually in a position (given the aspirations of "back-benchers" to also once gain promotion to the government ranks) to impose their will on the governing party. Moreover, there are few checks and balances on the government, given the lack of a written constitution, the absence of an Upper House, and the inability of the opposition to stop government legislation (Palmer, 1987). The system, traditionally defended on the grounds that it produces decisive governments with a clear mandate, has more recently come under growing criticism because of the perceived "betrayal" by governments of election promises, particularly since 1984, and because of the imposition of unpopular policies. Recent governments have been accused of being arrogant and unresponsive to public demands, and the characterisation of the system as one of "elected dictatorship" seems to have won broader currency (Mulgan, 1989). Consequently, the demand for a change of the system, e.g., towards the introduction of some form of proportional representation, is gaining widespread support.⁴

One of the implications of this government system is, as noted, the enormous concentration of power in the hands of the executive. This makes that the ideological orientation of the government, its commitment to particular values or goals, is all-important. This factor has also been of decisive significance with regard to the question what the proper role of the State is, and has been responsible for a revolutionary change in this respect in New Zealand during the last eight years. The shift in the role of the State has also had important consequences for the institutional framework within which policy development takes place, in particular for the development of environmental policy and the management of natural resources.

In New Zealand, the State has traditionally been heavily involved in the development of resources, their processing, the regulation and protection of industries (e.g., by import controls), and export promotion. The involve-

ment of the State in economic and social matters was not only dictated by the need for the establishment of an infrastructure to integrate a colonial society into the economy of the western world, but also promoted by a predominant view in New Zealand of the State as a "benevolent" institution for society (Self, 1985). New Zealand was the first country in the world to introduce female suffrage, and one of the first to introduce a comprehensive, State-funded, social welfare system. The State was also looked upon as a facilitator of agricultural development, helping young farmers to get established (by clearing native forests or "marginal" land), and provided subsidies and price guarantees. The State also played an active role in forestry, tourism, hydro-development, and the exploitation of other energy resources and minerals. A most salient illustration of this can be found in the initiation by the National government in the late 1970s of a series of energy-based "Think Big" projects, designed to make New Zealand less dependent on overseas energy sources.

However, the direct involvement of the State in resource management and development increasingly caused friction, particularly when public concern about the wisdom of some development projects promoted by the government started to become more substantial. Because of the impact of these projects on scenic and natural values, government involvement in these activities was characterized as "state-sponsored vandalism" (Salmon, 1960). More and more, environmentalists started to question the role of government departments and agencies in the management of natural resources. In particular, the combination of development and environmental protection responsibilities in single agencies with "dual mandates" came under suspicion. The claim that such a combination of functions was desirable, or even necessary, for the sake of integrating development and environment interests was perceived as lacking credibility, given the record of these agencies and the apparent predominance of development interests in their "balancing acts".

With the coming to power of the fourth Labour government in 1984, the role of the State in New Zealand society started to change drastically. It is ironic that it was a Labour government that introduced radical "free market" policies, undoing many of the policies which had been put in place by previous Labour governments and "interventionist" National governments. The government floated the NZ dollar, opened the economy up by reducing tariffs and eliminating other barriers to the movement of goods and capital, and abolished the granting of government subsidies for farming and other economic activities, as these were considered as distorting the operation of the free market. At the same time, the involvement of the State in economic development was rationalised by the separation of profit oriented and regulatory activities, and by the creation of nine State-owned enterprises which were expected to run on a commercial basis. At a

later stage, the government engaged in a programme of selling State assets and corporations, on the basis of the argument that these activities were not part of the proper role of the State, that commercial activities are most efficiently performed by the free market, and that there was a need to reduce the government deficit. In a rapid pace, the economy changed from a highly regulated one into one of the most unregulated in the world, with an almost exclusive reliance on Chicago-style, "New Right" economic philosophies. Direct taxation was significantly reduced, the lowering of inflation became an overriding goal, and market-led economic growth was expected as a result.

Six years later, in 1990, after the apparent failure of these policies in bringing about economic growth, producing instead a spectacular rise in unemployment and an economic recession, a change in government took place. However, despite the expectation that the new National government would adopt more moderate and pragmatic policies, it continued on the same line, embarking on the application of free market (user pays) principles in the health and education sectors, and on a policy of dismantling the welfare State to a "bare minimum". As a result, the government was rewarded with an all-time low in popularity in the history of opinion polls in New Zealand, whilst growing social misery and disillusion with politicians further discredited the political system.

After 1984, the Labour government also embarked on a comprehensive reform of the public service. The reform was based on a variety of principles, mainly derived from public choice theories, related to a quest for enhancing efficiency, accountability, transparency, and responsiveness. Agencies with "dual mandates" were split up, departments were required to become more goal-oriented by the introduction of corporate plans, permanent heads of departments were replaced by chief-executives appointed on a contract basis, and their accountability to ministers enhanced through the signing of performance contracts. Chief-executives, in their turn, received more flexibility in the running of their departments, and the appointment of personnel. Overall, the concept of a career public service, with life-time job security, and based on principles inherent to the Westminster model, was severely eroded by the reforms (Boston et al., 1991).

The redefinition of the role of the State had important implications for the decision-making framework with regard to environmental policy and resource management. With the corporatisation, and subsequent privatisation, of State-owned enterprises, the management of resources with commercial potential (such as energy, forestry, Crown-land suitable for farming) was transferred from the State to commercially oriented institutions. This effectively meant that policy development with regard to those resources was also delegated to these corporations, and becoming primarily subject to commercial considerations. Although this left the government

in a regulatory position with regard to these resources, it moved away from developing policies in these areas, out of fear that these would reintroduce distortions in the operation of market forces. The Ministry of Energy, for example, was abolished, and with it the government's energy policy. Remnants of the ministry have been transferred to the Ministry of Commerce, but the government's institutional capacity for developing long-term, conservation oriented energy strategies has been seriously impaired as a result of this reform, leaving energy management "in a mess" (Melhuish, 1991).

On the other hand, it appears that the move towards a greater reliance on the market for the allocation and development of resources has also had positive effects from an environmental point of view. Some of the incentives for farming on marginal land, a major cause of the clearance of forests, "scrub", and erosion, have disappeared with the abolition of government subsidies. The logging of indigenous forests in some remote areas has been greatly reduced because of the fact that these operations were clearly not commercially viable. Much of the Crown-land which was considered of little commercial value, but ecologically important, was allocated to a new Department of Conservation, to be managed on the basis of conservation principles.

One more significant change which was set in motion by the Labour government after 1984 is the reform of local government, and, related to that, a devolution of responsibilities from central government towards the regional and local level. The number of territorial (local) authorities was greatly reduced by amalgamation, and by a rationalisation of a multitude of specialised agencies (Catchment Boards, Harbour Boards, etc.) (Bush, 1990). Almost running parallel to this reform a comprehensive review of resource management legislation took place, which resulted in the introduction of the Resource Management Act in 1991, consolidating 59 former statutes. The act transferred the bulk of resource management responsibilities, including the granting of consents for development activities, to local and regional authorities. The act introduced an integrated approach by requiring the simultaneous consideration of environmental effects on land, water, air, social and cultural values, on the basis of the principle of sustainability. Although the central government maintains responsibility for the formulation of national policy statements and standards on issues of national or special importance, the act, in combination with the other reforms referred to above, further shifts the emphasis with regard to decision-making on environmental issues and the management of resources from the centre of the State towards a diversity of institutions, of a public and private nature.⁵

The Implementation of Environmental Policy: Obstacles to Making it Work

Given the comprehensive nature of the concept of environmental policy, many, if not most, government agencies have some kind of responsibility or involvement in environmental matters. Environmental policy has three dimensions: ecological (safeguarding the integrity of ecosystems), social (quality of life), and economic (sustainable resource use) (Bührs, 1991a). Many policies, such as economic, agricultural, and transport policies, which are often not referred to as "environmental" policies, are, in fact, just that, given their significant impact on one or more of these dimensions (Bartlett, 1990). Given the "web of interdependence" of life, and the inter-relatedness of human activity with the physical and natural environment, there is a need for developing and implementing policies in a comprehensive way, in order to ensure consistency, avoid mutually negating policies, and to take into account synergistic, sleeper and threshold effects (Bartlett, 1990; Dryzek, 1987). One of the main challenges in developing effective environmental policies is to translate environmental interdependence into administrative practice. Given the numerous agencies involved in the implementation of environmental policy, how do we ensure that they work together, and not against each other?

Another way of framing this question is to ask how the co-ordination of environmental policy can be improved. Environmental policy co-ordination, however, is a highly complex and difficult matter (Molnar and Rogers, 1982). Obviously, given the inclusiveness of environmental policy, it is impracticable, and undesirable, to amalgamate all agencies with environmental responsibilities into one "superagency". The experience with the creation of large-scale environmental agencies demonstrates that they do not necessarily provide a mechanism for improved co-ordination, nor an avenue for more comprehensive policy development and implementation (Painter, 1980; Rabe, 1986). Big bureaucracies have a tendency of developing internal divisions, recreating barriers to co-ordination, and have the potential of becoming bureaucratic nightmares or monsters. Instead, a more realistic and desirable approach to co-ordination accepts a certain amount of institutional fragmentation as inevitable, and even desirable, and aims to develop other mechanisms through which environmental policy development and implementation is brought into line.

Roughly, two categories of mechanisms, representing two approaches to co-ordination, can be distinguished: substantive and procedural (Bührs, 1990). Substantive co-ordination relies on the existence or development of common goals or purposes. This implies that potentially conflicting mandates of agencies are made compatible, for instance, by incorporating cer-

tain overriding principles, such as the principle of sustainability, into the mandates of these agencies (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Procedural co-ordination relies on processes such as the use of authority, power, or mutual adjustment to bring the activities of a number of actors in line with each other, and does not require the existence or development of common goals. The values or goals which underlie these forms of co-ordination are those of an authoritative agency, a dominant actor, or of a diversity of actors or "partisans" (Lindblom, 1965) respectively.

Co-ordination through a central, authoritative agency, although characterized as the "benchmark" of co-ordination (Minnery, 1988), has been criticized as very demanding, if not impossible, with regard to analytical requirements, and as potentially dangerous because of the concentration of power involved. By comparison, mutual adjustment is often seen as a more desirable form of co-ordination, contributing to a greater wealth and diversity of information in the process, and as more responsive in terms of the values and goals of the actors involved (Lindblom, 1965; Painter, 1981). Co-ordination by common purpose is generally regarded as politically unrealistic, occurring only in exceptional circumstances (Gregory, 1989; Minnery, 1988).

In New Zealand, a Commission for the Environment was established in 1972 for the main purpose of assisting the Minister for the Environment in his role of co-ordinating the government's policies with regard to the environment. The commission did not carry responsibility for any particular area of environmental policy or resource management, but could advise the government on any matter bearing on the environment. Although the commission did not have any formal powers, it was responsible for administering environmental assessment procedures (called "Environmental Protection and Enhancement Procedures"), and for "auditing" environmental impact reports prepared by proponents of development initiatives.⁶ The commission was a small agency, with a total staff of less than forty, and few resources compared to other central government agencies (Bührs, 1991a).

In principle, the idea of creating an overseeing agency with regard to environment matters seems a good one, for the reasons advanced above. By developing an overview of the gaps, inconsistencies, and other problems in the implementation of policies affecting the environment, a central agency is potentially in a better position to contribute to the development of comprehensive or co-ordinated environmental policy than if it were allocated responsibility for only one segment of environmental concern (such as pollution). A central environment agency could potentially be put in a position similar to other powerful central agencies, such as treasuries or State personnel commissions or boards (Painter, 1981).

However, the Commission for the Environment in New Zealand was not able to live up to this potential. The lack of formal powers was one of the key factors responsible for this, as it brought the commission in a position of having to rely on the goodwill of other departments and agencies. In fact, the commission found itself in the role of a "partisan" for environmental values, with very limited resources, in a situation where co-ordination depended on mutual adjustment. This situation was mainly the result of a rather feeble commitment of New Zealand governments to environmental matters, which can be attributed to a large extent to the direct involvement of New Zealand governments in resource development, as discussed in the previous section. The institutional arrangements for environmental policy and resource management reflected a development oriented bias, and led to a generally low level of government appreciation for the initiatives and advice of the commission. In fact, the commission was more regarded as a "nuisance" by many members of governments as well as government officials of other departments, rather than as a valuable instrument for promoting environmental policy co-ordination (Bührs, 1991a).

Not surprisingly, the commission had very limited success in its efforts to co-ordinate environmental policy (Bührs, 1991b). Conflicts between the government's development ethic (shared by several government departments) and environmental values led to the adoption and implementation of policies with adverse environmental effects, both with regard to the conservation of nature, as well as to the less prominent areas of environmental concern discussed in a previous section.

After the change of government in 1984, Labour initiated a process of institutional reform, partly inspired by environmental demands for a strong environmental agency, and, more importantly, by a broader quest for enhancing the performance of the civil service on the basis of "free market" and public choice theories. This resulted in the establishment of a Ministry for the Environment (1986), a Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment (1986), and a Department of Conservation (1987). Most agencies with "dual mandates" were disestablished, along with the Commission for the Environment.

Compared to the Commission for the Environment, the Ministry for the Environment is in a stronger position, with a responsibility for environmental policy development, and having been given a "reporting function", which requires the Ministry to report on all proposals which may have significant environmental implications before they go to Cabinet. However, the reporting function does not work satisfactorily, and the Ministry does not have the power to require information, or to impose environmental conditions or demands on other agencies. In fact it is, as the Commission was, in a position of having to rely on mutual adjustment strategies in

its co-ordination efforts. Moreover, its position of environmental "partisan" or advocate is constrained by the fact that it is required to play a "balancing role", taking into account "all values" placed by individuals and groups on the environment.⁷ This position of neutrality, combined with an emphasis on a strategy of persuasion with regard to other government agencies, prevents the Ministry from tapping much more heavily into the growing power of its natural constituency, the rising number of people concerned about the environment as reflected, amongst other, in the enormous growth of support for environmental groups at the end of the 1980s (Bührs, 1991b).

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment's role is to keep under review the functioning of agencies and processes established to manage, allocate, use, and preserve natural and physical resources. The office, a primer in the world, has significant investigative powers, and is independent from ministerial control. Its potential as a "system guardian", enhancing the responsiveness of the decision-making process to neglected or underexposed points of view, thereby contributing to the quality of information reaching decision-makers (George, 1972) has not yet come to full fruition, given the very limited resources made available to the commissioner (only eight professional staff members), and the growing pressure on the office to get involved into numerous "fire-fighting" issues (Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, 1990).

Resource constraints have also affected the effectiveness of the Department of Conservation, which was established, in 1987, as an advocate for nature conservation, amalgamating the nature protection functions of previously existing government agencies with dual mandates. The establishment of the department was a victory for environmentalists with a prime concern for nature conservation, significantly strengthening their position within the sphere of government. With a responsibility for the management of extensive areas of protected Crown land, for the protection of many endangered species, for watching over coastal development, and for assessing the environmental implications of proposed mining and other resource use activities in protected areas, the department is, however, heavily overloaded. Boggled down by numerous, contentious issues, it has come under criticism from various sides, as either wanting to lock-up resources, or as not protecting them forcefully enough.

In large part, the effectiveness of these agencies depends on the level of government commitment to the environment, and on the priorities set by the government. Despite the second wave of environmentalism, recent New Zealand governments still seem to be primarily preoccupied with stimulating economic growth per se, not with developing policies based on environmental criteria. Although, in 1991, a Resource Management Act was adopted which introduced a more integrated approach to resource

management on the basis of the principle of sustainability, the implementation of the act has been largely delegated to regional and local levels of government, leaving the development of, for instance, economic, energy, agricultural, and transport policies on the national level unaffected. Furthermore, the delegation of resource management responsibilities under the act to the regional and local level implies, de facto, a strengthening of the role of (quasi-)judiciary institutions in the process. Planning tribunals, required to hear appeals against resource management decisions, are increasingly involved in making political decisions because of the indeterminate, and potentially mutually conflicting nature, of the values incorporated in the legislation.

The uncertainty, and to some extent disappointment, about the performance of the new agencies and institutions with regard to the management of natural and physical resources, and the development and implementation of environmental policy, illustrates the difficulty of improving policy performance through institutional reform (Scharpf, 1986; March and Olsen, 1989). It also underlines the importance of the political ideology and commitment of governments as a factor influencing the successful implementation of environmental policies. Although the role of bureaucracy and other implementing agencies is significant in determining the outcomes of policies, it is the (longer term) degree of political support for those policies which ultimately determines their success, imposing limits on what environmental agencies can do (Bührs, 1991a).

Conclusion

The perception of New Zealand as a "clean and green" country, combined with the efforts of New Zealand governments with regard to international and global environmental issues, creates an image of a country where environmental values enjoy a high standing. To the casual observer, New Zealand seems to be advanced in the protection of its environment, and, in some respects, even to take the lead in the promotion of sound environmental policies on an international level.

An analysis of New Zealand's domestic environmental record reveals that some issues, notably nature conservation issues, have traditionally received more attention than other environmental problems. The higher profile of nature conservation issues does not imply, however, that government commitment or policy performance in this area has been stronger than in other areas; it is more a reflection of the dependence of the New Zealand economy on the development of natural and physical resources, and of the direct involvement of the State in such development until re-

cently. It is the State's dismal record with regard to the management of natural resources, characterised as "State sponsored vandalism" by environmentalists, which, in reaction to this, led to the emergence of a strong conservation movement, and to the steady ascent of these issues on the political agenda.

The direct involvement of the State in resource management, combined with a tradition of strong executive government in New Zealand, led to a confrontational style of environmental policy development, with environmentalists both attacking the State's performance and involvement in resource development, as well as focusing on the executive (and not so much Parliament, or the Judiciary) in their search for solutions. Given the de facto priority given to economic development by governments and bureaucracies, in their dual role of developing and conserving or protecting resources, the efforts of the environmental movement have led to more frustrations than successes. This caused environmentalists to advocate institutional reform in order to eliminate the dual mandates of government departments, and to create a strong advocate for the environment within the sphere of government.

The quest for environmental reorganization coalesced with the drive for a much broader and incisive reform of the role of the State initiated by the Labour government in 1984, based on "New Right" free market and public choice principles. This has resulted in a growing reluctance on the part of recent governments to take the lead, or even to provide guidance, in the allocation and management of resources. Although this retreat from the tradition of direct intervention by the State in resource management has led to the discontinuation of some environmentally harmful policies and practices, there is, however, no guarantee that the devolution of decision-making and implementation to other institutions, including the free market, local and regional government, and the courts, will lead to better environmental outcomes. Market failure, the traditional pro-development orientation of local government, and the limitations and inappropriateness of the judicial system to deal with environmental policy matters, all raise serious questions about the wisdom of such a move, and add to, rather than reduce, the ambiguity with regard to the integration of environmental and economic policy.

With environmental issues increasingly taking on an international and global dimension, the role of central governments with regard to changing resource policies has become more crucial than ever. Such changes require strong guidance, and an effective co-ordination of environmental policy on a national level. This implies that fundamental choices about the allocation and use of resources cannot be left to the market, local government, or the courts, and that more than "corrective action" is required from governments. It is therefore likely that governments in New Zealand, eager to

maintain the country's global image of a "clean and green" leader in the protection of environmental values, will come under increasing pressure to match domestic performance to global pretensions.

Notes

- 1 This is a simplified version of more elaborate models of the policy cycle approach. As an analytical device, the policy cycle model is useful to identify the many factors that impinge on the evolution of policies, from their initiation to their demise. When applied to a policy area over time, the approach helps to highlight the recurrent themes and principal factors in the evolution of policy in that area. For a discussion of the policy cycle approach see e.g., Jenkins (1978) and Hogwood and Gunn (1984).
- 2 Forest burning had been practiced by the Maoris, who arrived in New Zealand 800 years before the Europeans, as a Moa-hunting technique, as well as for agricultural purposes. It was established, however, that 53 percent of the land was still covered by forests at the start of European settlement in the 1840s. See Commission for the Environment (1985).
- 3 Interestingly, the first national park, Tongariro National Park, was established in 1887, not in response to public demand, but as a result of a gift by a Maori Chief to the government, to be held in trust for the people of New Zealand for all time. This gesture was inspired by a fear that the land, comprising ancestral mountains, would otherwise be taken by European settlers. Since then, however, eleven other national parks have been created, most of which in reaction to initiatives by the conservation movement.
- 4 Effectively, a system of proportional representation (MMP) was introduced in 1993 after two referenda on electoral systems were held. This has significantly enhanced the chances of the Green Party, which has entered into a coalition with other small parties in "the Alliance", to gain substantial representation in Parliament after the next elections.
- 5 For a more extensive and updated discussion of the evolution of environmental policy in New Zealand, see Bührs and Bartlett (1993).
- 6 Such reports were only required for proposals initiated by government agencies, or proposals requiring government finance or consent, and which were considered to have significant environmental implications.
- 7 There is disagreement, however, even within the ministry's ranks, about whether this is a requirement imposed by the statute on which the ministry is based, or whether this is a self-imposed interpretation of the law.

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